



Hom Travis Langley Ph.D.

Beyond Heroes and Villains

Batman at 75: The Psychology of Why the Dark Knight Endures

Why does the Caped Crusader still intrigue us on the hero's 75th anniversary?

Posted Mar 30, 2014



Source: <http://www.dccomics.com/characters/batman>
(<http://www.dccomics.com/characters/batman>)

Batty anniversaries fill 2014. This year marks the 100th anniversary of the birth of Batman's uncredited co-creator Bill Finger,

(<http://www.billfingerlegacy.com>) the 75th anniversary of Batman's first appearance (<http://herocomplex.latimes.com/games/batman-75th-anniversary-warner-bros-dc-reveal-bat-logo-bat-plans/#/0>) in print, the 50th anniversary of the "New Look" (<http://dccomicsartists.com/batman/NewLook.htm>) that editor Julius Schwartz masterminded to take the Caped Crusader back to his more serious roots, and the 25th anniversary of the motion picture (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0096895/>) (starring Michael Keaton and Jack Nicholson, directed by Tim Burton, and produced by Michael Uslan, Ben Melniker, Jon Peters, and Peter Guber) that proved the world still welcomed Batman. March 30 is the official anniversary of Batman's debut in Detective Comics #27 (http://dc.wikia.com/wiki/Detective_Comics_Vol_1_27) (cover date May, 1939), although there is some uncertainty over that because the issue may have hit newsstands in early April or as late as April 18. Regardless, as of this spring, Batman has appeared in print consistently for 75 years, a feat only 76-year-old Superman (<http://www.comicvine.com/action-comics-1-superman-champion-of-the-oppressed/4000-105403/>) has topped. Across all media, though, through comic books, TV shows, motion pictures, cartoons, comic strips, coloring books, View-Master slides, video games, and more,

especially for the last 50 of those 75 years, Batman has appeared more times.

Why?

Why has the Dark Knight endured? As I've asked here before, why Batman?

(<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/beyond-heroes-and-villains/201208/dark-and-stormy-knight-why-batman>) Every reason for his popularity relates to the in-fiction psychology of the character and

the real-world psychology of the audience. His origin

(<http://goldenagebat.blogspot.com/2011/11/detective-comics-33.html>) is brutally believable: A family goes home after an evening at the movies. A robber steps out of the night. Father stands up for mother. Mother screams for father. Two shots, and both die. A young boy vows to avenge them - avenge, not revenge (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/punishment>) - by waging a war on all crime (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/law-and-crime>) to keep others from suffering what his family went through. (<http://comicsalliance.com/the-10-greatest-batman-stories-by-bill-finger/>) Even people who do not know Batman's origin understand the desire to have a hero stand up for us in the darkness, to know there are people who will take on life's bullies no matter what.

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Dr. Travis Langley
@Superherologist

#WhyBatman #Batman75 Why the Dark Knight endures: He turns fear into hope and weakness into strength.



(<https://twitter.com/Superherologist/status/450099665384390658>)

Source: Twitter @Superherologist

On Twitter, as @Superherologist (<http://twitter.com/Superherologist>), I shared some thoughts on why the Dark Knight has endured for three quarters of a century, on why we still love (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/relationships>) Batman.

- He'll stand up to the whole world for you.
- He'll sacrifice his own happiness (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/happiness>) to keep others from suffering his family's fate.
- He values what's right more than he values the rules.

- The hero who looks like a monster teaches us to look deeper than what's on the outside.
- Because he is NOT judge, jury, executioner.
- Vampires still intrigue us. He looks like one without sparkling.
- We can't fly to super-powered heights, but we can reach higher than we are.
- We've never stopped needing heroes.
- When help seems unlikely, we welcome help of an unlikely kind.
- Even if we stop wishing for the impossible, we can carry hope for the improbably possible.
- Superman was the first superhero to shine. Batman was first to fill the darkness.
- He is a symbol, figuratively shining as brightly as the Bat-Signal in Gotham's sky.
- In sunlight, we're not so afraid. In darkness, we welcome a strong, dark friend.
- He will not give up.
- Batman endures in our world because he endures in his own.
- He has the best rogue's gallery, enemies defined by personalities instead of powers.
- He made himself Batman. No radiation, magic ring, or extraterrestrial origin required.
- He's the part of us that wants to scare life's bullies away.
- He turns fear (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/fear>) into hope and weakness into strength.
- His lifestyles, plural, as both Batman and Bruce Wayne tap into wish fulfillment fantasy.
- His origin taps into the most basic, most primal fear.
- He inspires hope in most and fear among evildoers.
- He has those wonderful toys. It wouldn't make sense for most superheroes to have them.
- His wonderful toys mean more wonderful toys we can play with, too.
- We don't consider a child stupid for vowing a dauntingly difficult war on all crime.
- We don't judge a child harshly for the horror that happened to his parents (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/parenting>).

- He works on many levels, as the light Caped Crusader & the moody Dark Knight.
- He's archetypal.
- He's timeless.
- He adapts.
- The dark hero's faith (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/religion>) that humanity deserves to be defended is reassuring to us.
- He faces the world's worst people, and yet he considers most people worthwhile.
- Because he had faith that 2 boats full of people afraid for their lives would do right.
- Batman will defend us whether we feel worthy or not.
- He sees potential in people. He helps you see your own as well.
- Superheroes can be inspirational. Batman is also aspirational. We can hope to be more like he.
- He's human.
- He's Batman.
- We are Batman. #WEareBATMAN (<https://twitter.com/search?q=%23WEareBATMAN&src=hash>)

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In addition to espousing those thoughts of my own, on both Twitter (<http://twitter.com/Superherologist>)

and [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/BatmanBelfry) (<https://www.facebook.com/BatmanBelfry>) I also collected some ideas from others on this issue:

- [DrSpliffhanger](#): He endures because he represents both the flawed [nature](https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/environment) (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/environment>) of man, and its capability for absolute perfection.
- [miguelangeltoro](#) (<https://twitter.com/miguelangeltoro>): Because he's the hero that all of us would like to be.
- [willb473](#) (<https://twitter.com/willb473>): even if we stop deserving them [reply to "We've never stopped needing heroes."]
- [HolliLoki](#) (<https://twitter.com/HolliLoki>): Others of us enjoy the fantasy that a trust-fund hippie can actually serve society in a direct and measurable way.
- [NOLA_Fredo](#) (https://twitter.com/NOLA_Fredo): I'd say because the character speaks to our desire to set the world right after something unbalances it.
- [TheBradyBoone](#) (<https://twitter.com/TheBradyBoone>): He's BATMAN!
- [DMann2_Official](#) (https://twitter.com/DMann2_Official): because he is awesome. Haha
- [Batmancanseeyou](#) (<https://twitter.com/Batmancanseeyou>): You're welcome.
- Howard Bliss Reinvention, profusion of media, transmitted generational goodwill

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- Bill Ramey Because he is US!
- Kevin Corvo Awalt All the classic Superheroes have had multiple variations in the I origins, multiple variations on their powers and multiple incarnations in multimedia since Superman first hoisted that car above his head on the cover of Action Comics. No matter what version of Batman you look at, he is always human. There is nothing about him that is unachievable. He is the step beyond what all the self help gurus claim we can do if we set our minds to it. If I train hard enough, work hard enough, committed myself to perfection, I can not only be successful, I can stand up to the biggest threats I can imagine and make a change. As I have grown up, Batman has gone from my idol with cool cars, amazing martial art skills and loads of money to my idol that never stops working to make his world a better place. Not with super powers, but with an indomitable drive to never back down.

- Jose Corchado (<https://www.facebook.com/jose.corchado1?fref=ufi>) Because He's The Most Awesome Superhero Ever and He's Also My Favorite.
- Stephen Harvey Because Batman became Batman by turning tragedy into a motivation (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/motivation>). He wasn't born with his talents (Superman) nor did he acquire them by accident (Daredevil, Flash, Spider-Man, etc.) nor was he chosen (Green Lanterns). He was just a rich boy who was in the wrong place at the wrong time. People can identify to that because it could happen to anyone.
- Thinker Thinkerton But yeah, in all seriousness, to me, he represents empowerment, complexity, intelligence (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/intelligence>), brilliance, darkness, innovation (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/creativity>), perseverance and just overall coolness and bad-ass-ness! He is inspirational! They have found so many ways to develop and explore all of those traits and characteristics over the years that it was impossible to just ignore the Batman all this time. He is also one of the few superheroes that I feel adults can openly express a fondness for, to be honest lol. Here's to another 75 years of the Dark Knight!
- Peter Brown (<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=840138129&fref=ufi>) Simply put, he is a self made character that allows the common person to appreciate or even strive to better themselves because of him. And he always has a plan.
- Shawn James (<https://www.facebook.com/sjames9191?fref=ufi>) Because Batman is always out numbered, out gunned and faces opponents/ allies way more powerful than himself but always trumps because of the reasons stated by Thinker Thinkerton & Peter Brown. He's either made a plan or comes up with one on the spot. He's has a plan to neutralize EVERYONE, even the good guys. Just sayin'
- ShadowQuill Black Because Batman is a symbol of hope, especially when we have none. He represents the message that out of absolute darkness, when it looks like things are about as bad as they can be, there is still light. He shows that it only takes one person to make a difference and that even after experiences that knock us down to our knees, we can still recover if we follow our heart and stand up for what we believe to be right.

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Once upon a time, cartoonist [Bob Kane](http://bobkane.com) (<http://bobkane.com>) created a name. Determined to come up with the next big thing after the recent success of Superman since the Man of Steel's sensational debut in *Action Comics*' (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Action_Comics_1) first issue, Bob decided he wanted his own Bat-Man, a masked comic book hero who would have no superpowers. He took his preliminary sketch to writer [Bill Finger](https://www.facebook.com/billfingergroup). (<https://www.facebook.com/billfingergroup>) Bill suggested changes to every defining feature, and the two kept brainstorming about this new character. After that weekend, Bob made his deal with [editor Vincent Sullivan](http://www.sequentialart.com/archive/mar99/dc.shtml) (<http://www.sequentialart.com/archive/mar99/dc.shtml>) and everything took off from there. [Artist Jerry Robinson](http://www.nydailynews.com/life-style/jerry-robinson-comic-book-legend-creator-batman-nemesis-joker-dead-89-article-1.988623) (<http://www.nydailynews.com/life-style/jerry-robinson-comic-book-legend-creator-batman-nemesis-joker-dead-89-article-1.988623>) became the first ghost artist to work with Kane. The three of them - Bob, Bill, and Jerry - were a [team](https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/teamwork) (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/teamwork>) for a time, cranking out characters like Catwoman, the Joker, Robin the Boy Wonder, and Alfred the butler. [Writer Gardner Fox](http://dc.wikia.com/wiki/Gardner_Fox) (http://dc.wikia.com/wiki/Gardner_Fox) and [artist George Roussos](http://www.comicvine.com/george-roussos/4040-1805/) (<http://www.comicvine.com/george-roussos/4040-1805/>) made early contributions as well, as have a long time of talented creators for six bits of a century. Those early creators are gone now. [Joe Giella](http://dc.wikia.com/wiki/Joe_Giella), Kane's last ghost inker (http://dc.wikia.com/wiki/Joe_Giella) on Batman stories in the 1960s, may be the only person left alive who worked with Bob and Bill on Batman, and yet they've all left a legacy that will last through the ages. For many reasons, Batman will endure.

Long live the bat. Happy birthday.

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In Print: *Batman and Psychology: A Dark and Stormy Knight*
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